

**Shaping the Future of Smith: Women in Non-Profits
Hosted by Elizabeth Wagner '02 at J.G. Geever, Inc.
March 31, 2006 in NYC**

President Christ opened the session by inviting alumnae to share their views about the ways in which Smith should be considering its future. She asked their input on three key questions, ones that the faculty, trustees and others are also taking up at this time: What are Smith's distinctive strengths and intellectual traditions? What capacities do we want to develop in all of our students? She then asked the pointed question, given the "landscape of higher education today," what are our challenges for the future? Where are we headed?

As examples of strengths, Carol cited Smith's well-documented success in placing women in the sciences. The need is real; while women are 46 percent of the workforce, they hold just 11 percent of the jobs in engineering, she pointed out.

The arts are also an area of longstanding achievement and distinction for Smith, having been part of the college's curriculum since its inception. "It would be impossible for a college today to create from scratch the richness of Smith's arts offerings," President Christ noted.

International study is also an area of distinction and strength, with nearly 50 percent of students going abroad before graduation.

The faculty has already begun vigorous conversations on the capacities Smith students should have when they graduate. These include effective writing and speaking; quantitative literacy (the ability to understand and analyze information presented in quantitative terms); and the ability to engage, inside and outside the classroom, in civil discourse and argumentation – the ability to "carry on civil discussion about issues on which people of seriousness and integrity disagree."

A woman from the class of '65 opened the discussion by stating she developed a social conscience and a sense of "giving back" as a student. She said the Dick Unsworth, religious courses, SOS, gave her a clear-thinking passion for the liberal arts. She said the accessibility of the professors and the house governing system helped to build confidence and physical, social, intellectual and spiritual strength.

Things she felt she didn't learn at Smith, but had to cultivate afterwards, were life-coping skills, financial survival, taking care of herself, speaking up. She felt that we should offer more courses in active listening and mediation in order to develop respect for a diversity of opinions. She said we need more alumnae speakers who are political activists.

Recent '05 grad, who was first generation in her family to go to college, said that Smith is now very economically diverse and supportive. She was able to take advantage of work-study off-campus in a non-profit setting that helped to build her resume. She loved her courses in theatre and government and felt there were wide course offerings. Now that

she is considering getting her PhD, she is recognizing that Smith's resources were wide and vast. She lauded the Ed Dept's practicum opportunities at the Herena School and the other relationships she developed with professors through the Khan Institute. She felt that the CDO was "amazing" and cited her Praxis internship in Boston at the Non-Profit Center for Cooperative Education, a consulting firm that helps to bring progressive values to inner city school systems.

She then said she felt we should require quantitative skills like stats in social sciences, writing intensives could also be more substantial and based on actual writing assignments. She said that study abroad was amazing, but being on Financial Aid made it tricky. Her aid didn't even cover housing, and the program can be financially prohibitive. She also was not in favor of the changes in dining, she said it led to further stratification of people in the houses (juniors sitting with juniors, etc). When she returned from her JYA, she didn't meet any new people.

A woman in '02 said that she was a dancer, and she would have benefited tremendously from the dining decision. She didn't have as many options and often felt "outside" of the community because so many of her dance courses were off-campus. She felt her housing was her strongest link to the community and appreciated that we still had that system. She said she learned a lot through Praxis by being involved in non-profits where she learned public relations and grant writing, which helped to shape her understanding of her dance. She learned choreography, debate, and was able to participate in the "Celebrations" Dance Performance with faculty.

CTC replied that we built a new dance studio last year. She said we need to find more ways to leverage strengths in the arts. She mentioned the new major being developed called Arts in Technology and wondered if a similar program could be designed for dance. She also said that one of the major themes she has been hearing from alumni is the desire for more social engagement and responsibility for students. Students want more opportunities to work among the community. Northampton has many non-profits and opportunities.

She then described the Senior Design Project and said a similar team will be put in place comprised of Social Science majors who will use their research skills to analyze the "decades of data" compiled at an organization for the homeless. She said there is an increase demand for an analytic view of the populations served by non-profits.

She also cited that the faculty expressed concern for developing the capacity for moral reasoning among students. As a result, the Philosophy Department is creating an Ethics concentration for the major.

A woman from '61 said that to her, diversity means being exposed to lots of different subjects with an opportunity to develop passion and curiosity. She said she was amazed at how socially conscious her classmates were. She didn't know where it came from.

An '02 grad said that she played a club sport and having two hours for dinner gave her no time to eat. She welcomes the changes and the freedom to explore outside the houses. She suggested that there would be other ways to preserve house community through teas, and social service projects (as a house) to link up with a community advisor.

CTC said that student athletes had a big influence in the dining changes. Students weren't getting their meals and wanted more menu variety. She said some house communities worked well and others went sour.

CTC went on to say that other themes that have come up are how Smith can teach life skills such as entering the workplace, balancing family/career, questions that are important in shaping a life. She referred to Narratives of success. She said she is encouraging students to think about multiple goals that define success in terms of family, partner, career, social responsibility. She referred to Laura Nash's book Just Enough, as an illustration of these multiple goals. She said the concept of women "opting out" of the workforce is naïve and simplistic and not helpful to women.

A woman from '85 asked if women were thinking about this. CTC replied that yes, very much so. Students want to learn more about coming family and careers.

The woman from '02, who was a dancer, said that Smith also needs to help students who are trying to have careers as artists. How to develop a plan and set goals, while often working at a "day job," needs to be illustrated, and there need to be role models. CTC joked and said that a young alumna in Sacramento commented "I wish you had told me that I wasn't going to become a Vice President in five years."

An alumna from '02 said that Judy Chicago was their commencement speaker and had said to them "you can't have it all." She said it was shocking but true. She said that she continues to have rich, fulfilling discussions with her friends about the life/career balance five or six years after college. She recommended having a series during J-term to discuss this.

An Ada from '92 said that there was something to be said for asking these questions in general. She said there are icons within our community (activists) that we should invite to be "in residence" like other artists in residence. She also introduced the idea of "social entrepreneurship" that she felt should be introduced to create new ideas for the future. She said we need a space to construct this, perhaps a center that would be rich and dynamic, cultural and anthropological. She was unhappy with the idea of women using nanny's to raise their children and saw this as "women coming to the fore on the backs of other women."

CTC mentioned that Ada's are doing great and will soon have a new apartment house for those with children.

A woman from '86 asked if there is a strategic discussion to expand graduate programs.

CTC replied that, no, in fact, they are paring down grad programs, but looking ahead to continuing ed programs in the summer, especially for women re-entering the workforce.

A woman from '61 asked about international students, to which CTC replied that 8% are international. She said we just admitted 3 Afghani students and set a record for admissions this year. She explained that often our strongest applicants are international students, but they are most often full-pay.

A woman from '02 said that women are not viewed kindly in other parts of the world, and Smith students need awareness of other cultures and must develop an easy facility with languages.

CTC mentioned her recent conference of women's colleges in Dubai, where she met women from the Middle East from colleges with less than fifteen years of history. She said these women have an agenda for advancing women, but it isn't tied to western feminism. It is often tied to conservative values. She also mentioned that there was a team from Mount Holyoke teaching leadership skills to Middle Eastern students.

She explained that students are now going abroad with different sets of reasons beyond just language and literature and that they often want to have an activist component to their work. She said science majors have a harder time find placements abroad.

An alumna asked if students go into the Peace Corps. CTC said she wasn't sure, and then another woman from '02 said that she did a year in Africa after graduation.

We ended with CTC discussing the specifics of the new Science and Engineering building and the long-term goal of a science quad across Green Street.